

OPERATIONS CENTER/CURRENT SUPPORT GROUP

News Bulletin

NEW YORK TIMES
Item 318 MARCH 1983
Pg. A12

Reagan Is Reported to Consider Making a New Proposal on Missiles

By HEDRICK SMITH
Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, March 17 — President Reagan has scheduled a meeting Friday with members of the National Security Council to consider three options for a new American negotiating proposal in the medium-range missile talks in Geneva, senior Administration officials disclosed today.

A ~~Washington~~ White House official said Mr. Reagan "is reviewing his options and he's closer to making some

decisions on where to go than he has been" in recent weeks. But this official cautioned that it was not likely the President would decide to have a new American proposal presented immediately to Soviet negotiators in Geneva before the talks recess late this month.

"It may end up with a decision or it may not," another high official said. "I can see the President wanting to meet again. He could say, 'I want to discuss this further' or 'Flush that one out for me more.'"

Other high Administration officials said Vice President Bush and Secretary of State George P. Shultz favored moving from the current American position, which calls for a ban on all medium-range nuclear missiles, to some interim plan that would reduce the present Soviet arsenal and put limits on scheduled American deployments.

'The Time Is Ripe'

After calls for a new American proposal from Chancellor Helmut Kohl of West Germany, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher of Britain, Foreign Minister Emilio Colombo of Italy and Prime Minister Ruud Lubbers of the Netherlands, Mr. Shultz was reported to feel "the time is ripe for a new approach," possibly even before the end of the month.

But officials said Defense Secretary Caspar W. Weinberger, with backing from the Joint Chiefs of Staff and other Pentagon officials, was resisting a shift in the American position now on the ground that Moscow will not make realistic concessions until American missile deployments begin in Europe late this year.

Publicly, Mr. Reagan has defended his initial position, known as the zero option, as the best possible, but privately officials said that in January, before Vice President Bush took a seven-nation tour of Europe to discuss the arms talks, the President ordered the development of alternative negotiating positions.

One official said the President's instructions conveyed the sense that he was "dissatisfied with where things are now" and "felt it was time to examine" various negotiating options after Mr. Bush returned from Europe in early February. According to this official, the

President "wants to move a bit, he wants to shake it up a bit." But officials cautioned that this still did not mean the President had made a decision yet on a new negotiating position.

4 Options Reported

Officials said four options had been prepared for him. They were described as "concepts" rather than detailed negotiating proposals.

The first option, officials said, would be to stand pat with the Administration's current position, the zero option, which calls for the elimination of about 600 Soviet SS-20, SS-4 and SS-5 medium-range missiles and the abandonment of American plans to deploy 572 Pershing 2 and low-flying cruise missiles in Europe.

A second option, according to officials, would limit each side to 100 medium-range nuclear missiles with a combined total of no more than 300 warheads, but permit each side the "freedom to mix" various types of missiles under these ceilings.

A third option, the officials said, would impose limits not only on missiles but also on bombers in the European theater that can carry nuclear weapons. An earlier informal proposal discussed by Soviet and American negotiators in Geneva called for 75 missiles and 150 bombers for each side, but both Governments turned it down.

A fourth option, officials said, is known internally as a "build-up, build-down plan" because it would have the United States gradually build up its arsenal of medium-range missiles as the Soviet Union "builds down" from its present inventory until the two sides have equal numbers, and then gradually reduce those arsenals.